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USDA'S REPORT TO CONSUMERS

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE · OFFICE OF INFORMATION · WASHINGTON, D.C. 20250

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NATIONAL OUTLOOK CONFERENCE SET

A Look At The Future. Sessions on rural family living and trends in the organization and control of food and fiber in the economy will be among the topics explored at the 1973 National Agricultural Outlook Conference. Dates for the Conference have been set for February 20 through 22 at the U.S. Department of Agriculture in Washington, D.C. Overall theme for the meeting, "The Future Structure of Agricultural Production and Marketing," also encompasses such presentations as the impact of environmental developments on agricultural production and marketing and the long-range expansion of demand for agricultural products. Leading authorities in agriculture and business participate in the annual Conference which draws economists, representatives of consumer organizations, agribusinessmen, and the general public. Sponsors of the Conference are USDA's Economic Research Service and Extension Service.

LEAFLET SPEAKS SENIOR CITIZENS' LANGUAGE

Just Their Type. Among older people, poor nutrition is a common problem -- often because of inadequate income. To supplement their food buying power, and that of other low-income groups, the U.S. Department of Agriculture administers two alternative food assistance programs, the Food Stamp Program and the Food Distribution Program. One or the other of these programs is available in virtually every county and independent city. However, not all elderly persons know about the food programs or take advantage of them. A new leaflet, "Food Aid For The Elderly" (FNS-81), designed specifically for senior citizens, has been published by USDA's Food and Nutrition Service to explain the programs. Bold lettering and color, above-average spacing between each work and line, and larger-than-standard type face help reduce eyestrain for senior citizens with sight problems. In addition to information on food aid, the leaflet discusses programs, Meals-On-Wheels and Drive-To-Serve, that provide home delivery of food to elderly recipients unable to get around. Senior citizens and persons working with senior citizens groups will find the leaflet of particular interest. Free copies of "Food Aid For The Elderly" (FNS-81) are available from the Information Division, Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250. Another leaflet that deals specifically with the Drive-To-Serve Program -- for areas where the Food Distribution Program is available -- may also be requested from the Food and Nutrition Service.

ALARMING FIRE STATISTICS

Natural and Unnatural Causes. Forest fires in the U.S. burned a total of over 4 1/4 million acres in 1971, a million more acres than in the previous year. According to a report from USDA's Forest Service, these fires occurred from one end of the country to the other -- literally. Florida and Alaska were the two States with the largest acreage burned, accounting for over half of the U.S. total. Florida's fire season was considered the worst in 20 years and on several occasions smoke from the fires caused closure of two international airports in the State. Alaska's fire statistics show that more than a million acres burned in that State. What caused all these fires? Lightning strikes for one; Man for another. Lightning-caused fires amounted to only 10 percent of the number of the fires started, but they accounted for well over one-third of the total acreage burned. Most of them occurred in sparsley settled areas in western States. Man-caused fires continue to be a threat to life, property, and natural resources, especially in the heavily populated eastern half of the U.S. Among the most serious threats are the deliberately set fires. Incendiariam accounted for over one-third of the acreage burned in the East and over half of those in southern States -- nearly six times the acreage from any other single cause. In fact, between 98 and 100 percent of all fires in the East were man-caused. A large part of these were caused by persons burning trash and other debris near wooded areas. The fires escaped from them, often causing serious damage. Now, about those piles of autumn leaves and other fall clean-up debris. . .

THE BROWN RECLUSE

Shy, But Dangerous. The brown recluse spider is aptly named: It is brown -- ranging from a gray brown to a deep red brown -- and it is a retiring, bashful creature fond of dark, quiet recesses. This, plus a venomous bite, makes it dangerous. The natural home of the brown recluse is in sheltered places outdoors -- under rocks and loose bark. But buildings that are dry, littered, and house many insects are likely to attract the spider indoors. Undisturbed areas in basements, attics, and closets are the most likely haunts of the brown recluse in homes. Garments left hanging in storage areas are favorite hiding places. The brown recluse is not aggressive, but it will sometimes bite if handled or when trapped in clothing. Fatalities from the bite are very rare. However, the bite is severe enough to require prompt medical attention. It is especially dangerous to children, the elderly, and persons not in good physical condition. Fifteen Southern States and South Central States are the main regions inhabited by the brown recluse spider. Single specimens have also been found in Arizona, California, New Jersey, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Wyoming, and Washington, D.C. A leaflet prepared by USDA's Agricultural Research Service describes the spider with its distinctive fiddle-shaped back marking, its habitat, and ways to combat it. It also gives symptoms of the spider's bite and first aid measures. Copies of Leaflet 556, "Controlling the Brown Recluse Spider," are available for 15 cents each from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.

OCTOBER PLENTIFUL FOODS LIST

Apples Lead The List. Fresh apples, featured on the October Plentiful Foods List, should be good buys for consumers during October. Other foods on the October List include canned applesauce, apple juice, rice, dry beans, wheat products, broiler-fryers, turkeys, and eggs. For November the Plentifuls will include rice, turkeys, broiler-fryers, eggs, fresh apples, applesauce, apple juice, cranberries, cranberry sauce, and cranberry juice cocktail.

HOW TO WIRE AN ACORN

And Other Organic Decorating Tips. Before the age of machinery and plastic, most Christmas decorations were made at home from plant material -- both fresh and dried. Whether its nostalgia or price or being tired of the uniformity of mass-production, making Christmas decorations from nature's materials has become increasingly popular. Most of the plant materials needed to make attractive and clever decorations can be picked up along country roads or in abandoned fields -- a refreshing hike in the country can be a side benefit from this creative activity. With imagination, some wire, and paint, milkweed pods and other seed pods, acorns, walnuts, cones, dried weeds can be turned into miniature Christmas trees, wreaths, corsages, centerpieces, and even artificial - but organic - poinsettias. Some tips on plant materials to use and how to use them are offered in a fact sheet prepared by horticulturists of USDA's Agricultural Research Service. Teachers, club program directors, or people planning a creative binge should find the information of help in planning a classroom activity or club meeting or as an inspiration for creating. Copies of the Christmas decoration sheet are available free -- while they last -- from Service, Office of Information, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.

CHOOSE CHEESE

A Lot Of Food Value In A Small Package. A whole world of flavors and textures await you in the cheese family. There are over 400 varieties of natural cheeses alone. You may not like some; others may become favorites. Any way you slice it, cheese is a versatile and nutritious food. It is good in main dishes, salads, sauces, as a snack or dessert. It contains most of the nutrients of milk, though in different amounts, and protein of the same high quality as that in meat, fish, and eggs. In a popular -- and recently revised -- USDA bulletin, "Cheese in Family Meals," (G-112) you will find tips on choosing cheese to suit your needs and palate, a guide for storing cheese at home, recipes and serving suggestions, and other pointers. Single copies of the booklet are available free from the Office of Information, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.

PLANTS THAT FEND FOR THEMSELVES

Insect-Proof Vegetables. An ideal way to control or suppress plant pests would be to have the plants do it for themselves. Plant resistance to insects leaves no insecticide residue in food or in the environment, harms no pollinating or otherwise friendly insects, lowers production costs, and only minimally disturbs nature's balance. Plant breeders and entomologists already have developed some insect-resistant crops -- wheat varieties that resist the Hessian fly and an alfalfa variety that holds its own with the spotted alfalfa aphid. Efforts are now being directed toward vegetables that put up a fight against insect enemies. Already some 25 vegetables are reported to fend off 35 species of insects. These successes, however, have been achieved with relatively modest research budgets and sometimes include little knowledge of the nature of the resistance and its inheritance. Too, breeding resistant crops is neither simple nor quick: Development of the Hessian fly-resistant wheat varieties took from 15 to 20 years from first crossing to final release to growers. A 5-year grant recently announced by the U.S. Department of Agriculture will provide funds to the Virginia State College, Petersburg, Va., to find ways to control insect damage to vegetables and other plants through genetic resistance. The scientists will determine why some varieties are especially prone to insects and others are not, locate sources of resistance in plants and seeds, and maintain a supply of germ plasm resistant to insects.

REVISED RURAL RENTAL REGULATIONS

A Spur To Housing. The U.S. Department of Agriculture has moved to stimulate production of rental housing for low-and moderate-income families and the elderly living in rural areas. New regulations for rental housing loans from USDA's Farmers Home Administration are expected to increase materially the supply of rental housing for rural people -- from newly formed families not yet ready for home ownership to the elderly for whom little housing provision is made in most small towns. Changes include a no-residency requirement for borrowers. Previously, a borrower was required to live near and supervise the rental project. Now a borrower can designate a local managing agent with full authority to act for him. Also, rental units may now be made available to persons with very low incomes through special arrangements with the Department of Housing and Urban Development: The FHA borrower leases his completed rental units to a local public housing authority which manages the property. HUD pays the difference between the rent the family can afford and the rental rate established for the unit. Other changes include low interest rates to limited-profit borrowers who will build rental housing for low-income families and up to 100 percent financing to nonprofit borrowers.

LIGHT -- NOT DARK -- HORSES

Subject Of New USDA Handbook. On Western ranges, cow ponies are still used for work; horseracing has become one of America's leading spectator sports; more people are riding for pleasure than ever before; projects in 4-H Horse Clubs outnumber projects in 4-H Beef Clubs. It all points out the fact that light horses and ponies continue to increase in numbers and importance. Recognizing the interest in this horsing around, USDA has recently published a handbook on breeding and raising light horses and ponies. The new publication lists 26 common light horse and pony breeds and describes the characteristics of each. The handbook gives information useful to both amateur and professional horsemen, such as selecting horses, determining age, care and feeding, necessary equipment, and diseases. Tables on recommended allowances for minerals and vitamins for the animals and a guide to feeding should help the experienced breeder improve his feeding program. In addition to photographs of each of the breeds listed, illustrations show floor plans for a horse barn, proper foot trimming, types of bits and other tack, and even a sample breeding contract for stallion owners. Dr. M.E. Ensminger, world authority on horses, collaborated with USDA's Agricultural Research Service in preparing the handbook. Copies of the handbook, "Breeding and Raising Horses," (AH-394) are available for $1.00 each from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.

MOVING?

Send The Label. Be sure to send along the address label from SERVICE if you are moving, changing your name, or otherwise altering your mailing address. Having the label enables us to make the proper changes more quickly and accurately.

SERVICE is a monthly newsletter of consumer interest. It is designed for those who report to the individual consumer rather than for mass distribution. For information about items in this issue, write: Lillie Vincent, Editor of Service, Office of Information, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250. Telephone (202) 447-5437.